

H.B. No. 7027

My name is Eddy Cartagena. I just want to say that it is an honor and a privilege to have this opportunity to speak before the committee this evening about house bill #7027, regarding the state budget for the biennium ending June 30th 2019.

I am a convicted felon, and I am also a person in long term recovery. If anyone were to have asked me two years ago whether I would be standing here today speaking in this capacity, I probably would have laughed at them. I was incarcerated at that time in a State of Connecticut correctional facility. The idea that my voice might one day carry a message powerful enough to effect change in a system that I believed to be oppressive and insensitive to the opinions and needs of myself or my fellow inmates, was a concept that would have seemed humorous to me at the time. Of course, now I realize that there is absolutely nothing humorous about the current state of affairs concerning such matters. Is there?

See, I was a person with a belief system that was built largely upon a foundation of fear. I was a 31yr old convicted felon, gang member, and drug addict. I wasn't Eddy Cartagena, the person who now values such things as being the best son, brother, uncle, employee, and neighbor that I can be. I wasn't the Eddy Cartagena who understands the importance of helping others, and of being proactive in giving back to a community that I once took so much from. I was inmate #373055, and the prospects for my success upon reentry into my community, seemed slim at best. I was afraid.

When I came out of prison I was referred, through parole, to the Easterseals Goodwill Industry Community Reentry program. A place where I learned to work through some of the fears that had been keeping me from pursuing the opportunities that were necessary to my success in reentering the community. Fears related to my lack of confidence entering into the workforce, due to complete unpreparedness and the stigma of being a convicted felon. Fear of not knowing even the most basic of skills required to obtain employment, such as properly filling out a job application. These skills, among many others, were not taught to me in schools, or by my parents. I didn't learn them growing up in the streets, or during all the time I spent in prison. The skills I learned in that reentry program gave me the confidence needed to compete, with anyone, felon or not, in today's competitive job market. They taught me the importance of helping others and of being of service to a community that I once believed had no place for a person such as myself. They taught me that I was valuable.

This program no longer exists, due to cuts in the state budgets. I am currently employed in a good job, that pays a better than living wage, and I am one of the companies most valued employees due to my strong work ethic. I am a leader, in my career, and in my community helping others navigate through the obstacles that once kept me from breaking that same cycle. And after 20yrs, I am currently off of all forms of state supervision. I am one person, who

with the help of programs like the Easterseals, has managed to step out of the revolving door of our prisons and programs of supervision. One person. I wonder, without programs like the one I went through around to help all of the other people reentering into our communities, what will they do? Thank you.